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REVITALIZATION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Letter dated 2 July 1992 from the Chairman of the Economic Commission for Europe to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I have the honour to submit to you the following observations of the Permanent Representatives of the member countries of ECE, meeting in Geneva in ad hoc informal session on 25 June:

They noted with satisfaction that the General Assembly, in its resolutions 45/264 and 46/235, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his report to the Assembly (A/46/882), had reaffirmed that economic and social development were among the highest priorities of the work of the Organization. Similarly they took note of the utmost importance which the Secretary-General attaches to the coordination and optimal use of all available resources in that field in order to ensure greater efficiency.

The Governments of ECE underscored the need for the United Nations to be in a position to make an effective contribution to the extraordinary situation in Europe, one of the regions for which it bore responsibility. They recalled the mandate which the Council had given to the Economic Commission for Europe, empowering it to respond in optimal fashion to the major issues and challenges in the field of economic and social cooperation which prevailed in the ECE region.

They wished to draw the attention of the Council to the fact that ECE membership had recently increased from 34 (1990) to 43, and that a further increase in the months ahead was foreseen. That represented a strong asset for economic and social cooperation among all countries of the region and a new challenge for ECE. Particularly important was the fact that 17 countries of the ECE region were countries in transition, among them new States with

urgent and basic requirements. That extraordinary situation, characterized by special needs for cooperation and assistance on a scale and of a nature that had no precedents in the region, called for appropriate action by the Commission. The need for such action implied, in several areas of activity, an increase in the work of the ECE member States and secretariat, in close cooperation with other relevant international organizations and institutions inside and outside the United Nations system.

The member countries judged that a proper and efficient conduct of the Commission's activities and an effective delivery of its mandated programmes could only be reached through an efficient use of available resources. To that end, they reaffirmed the need to continue to adapt the programme and methods of work of the Commission, along the lines defined in decision 0 (45) and avoiding duplication of work with other relevant bodies. The new demands of cooperation resulting from the changing realities within the region, including the needs of new member States, and the implementation of recommendations by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe should also be taken into account.

At its last annual session, in April 1992, members of the Commission had underlined the need to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of ECE by a proper allocation of available resources to priority sectors (decision B (47)).

They had noted that not all the budgeted human resources were available at the current time and had recalled the need to reduce drastically the number of vacancies, in an efficient and expeditious manner. As a consequence some important activities of ECE in priority areas must be suspended. To illustrate the difficulties, the Conference of European Statisticians recently adopted a resolution, which is enclosed for your information (see annex).

The member Governments of ECE appealed therefore to the Economic and Social Council to recommend to the General Assembly that the budgetary resources allotted to ECE be maintained and that solutions be rapidly found to redress the adverse effects on ECE of the current temporary suspension of recruitment in the United Nations, which had already resulted in a high number of vacant posts.

I would like to thank you for taking note of these elements and communicating them to the members of the Council as soon as possible.

(Signed) William ROSSIER
Chairman
Economic Commission for Europe

Annex

RESOLUTION OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS
ON SECRETARIAT RESOURCES

(as approved on 19 June 1992)

1. Gathered together on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Conference of European Statisticians, heads of national statistical offices of the member States reviewed the progress made in the work of the Conference. In all its 40-year history, the Conference has been the principal organization responsible for developing statistical systems which improve the quality of statistics and comparability of data across nations of the region. It has also responded particularly well to the new challenges which have emerged in recent years. Over the whole of this period it has had the full support of member countries.

2. However, the Conference noted with great concern that, far from being able to cope with currently increasing pressures for additional work - partly caused by the urgent needs of transition countries, as well as other pressing priorities - it has been forced to effect severe reductions in the previously approved priority programme of the Conference.

3. The Conference noted decision 0 (45) of the Economic Commission for Europe which established statistics as a priority sector and decision B (47) which asked the Executive Secretary to enlist the support of the Department of Administration and Management at United Nations Headquarters in filling vacancies in priority sectors, and in particular to appoint a Director of the Statistical Division without further delay.

4. In response to this priority designation, posts have been redeployed to statistics from other areas. Nevertheless, the United Nations recruitment freeze has meant that they remain unfilled. There are now four vacant Professional posts in the Statistical Division of the ECE, of which that of the Director is of particular urgency. The Deputy Director also will retire at the end of August. These vacancies represent one third of the Professional staff.

5. The Conference is therefore forced to neglect high-priority items in its programme of work, including environmental statistics and statistics on women (see the priority menu for 1992/93 of the Conference's work programme). These enforced cuts in important functions will cause severe long-term damage to the work of the Conference.

6. As the only organization covering the region as a whole, the Conference has an important role to play in international statistical cooperation. Without adequate resources in the ECE Statistical Division, however, it is impossible to fulfil this role.

7. In the absence of the professional leadership and management by a Director, coordination with other international statistical organs is severely impeded. This will create unnecessary inefficiencies in international programmes, impose unnecessary burdens on member States, and hinder statistical development in countries of the region, particularly the transition countries.

8. Despite the seriousness of the situation, the delegates present at the plenary session of the Conference reiterate that they continue to attach the highest importance to the unique role of the Conference and the Statistical Division of the ECE in regional statistical cooperation.

9. This Conference therefore requests that the United Nations give highest priority to filling first the post of the Director of the ECE Statistical Division and, secondly, the remaining vacancies in the Division.

10. The Conference asks the Chairman of the Economic Commission for Europe to inform the Commission of the contents of this resolution as soon as possible and to transmit it immediately to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.